3: Read E-5 (1935-1939) 1960
FR5 Ngoni FR5

Women's skills: Guardianship of property

Ngoni social organization, as we saw in Chapter I, placed the guardianship of all wealth except cattle in the hands of the women who were heads of houses. As a Ngoni girl grew towards adulthood and the time drew nearer when she would marry and leave her home for a strange village, the leading women of her father's house initiated her into the skills needed to create and preserve the forms of property for which she would some day be responsible.

First among these skills came the care of the hut and compound. The framework and roof of the huts were built by men, but the walls were mudded and the floors of the hut and veranda were strengthened and polished by women. Ngoni women of good family did not often do the actual plastering of mud upon the wooden framework of the hut. It was considered too dirty and exhausting a job for them to do, but they had to know how it should be done, and what standards of good work involved, in order that they might later instruct others. During a hut building Ngoni girls might be seen tucking up their clothes and rather half-heartedly slapping mud on the walls, to the good-humoured jesting of the village women who were vigorous and expert at the job. The girl's grandmother stood by and said at intervals: 'That is too thick; it will fall off. Fillup those cracks. Smooth over those joins,' and so on. The girls shrugged their shoulders and obeyed while Grandmother was watching, but gave up as soon as she went away.

The flat-ended flails with which the floor was beaten were heavy and girls were generally unable to use them expertly, but they were made to watch the process, with its seemingly endless beating of the earth floor compounded of river mud, ant-hill clay and cowdung. Once the floor was beaten so that it was level and all cracks had disappeared, the Ngoni girls were made to get down on their knees and learn how to polish it with damp ashes and a smear of cowdung, rubbed

7: Hodgson G-5 (1926) 1933 FR5 Ngoni FR5 Maravi FR4

12. *Customary Licence* (*Ngoni*).

N 836 [183] [684] [583] Pre-marital intercourse was strictly forbidden, but it is now the general practice, though disapproved of by the elders. While rarely claimed, it is still possible for a father to obtain damages from a man who is proved to have had connexion with his young unmarried daughter; and the bride-price is reduced when it is known that a girl has been playing fast and loose as a regular habit.

13. *Dissolution of Marriage* (*Ngoni*).

N 586 [595] Connubial disputes are decided at the husband's village. A wife may not be divorced on account of barrenness; but in such a case her father gives the husband a younger sister without further *mabeka*, or arranges with a friend or relation to give his daughter in return for a smaller bride-price.

When a divorce has been granted, it is made effective by the husband's *nakhoswe* taking the wife home and handing her back to her father. If there are no children, the bride-price is returned, together with the *mabeka*, *kutendera* and other presents made before marriage. Presents made by husband to wife after marriage are considered to be the woman's own property, and she takes them with her. If there are several children, the husband keeps them, and his father-in-law retains the bride-price. If there is only one child, and the bride-price was large, the husband keeps the child and also receives back a portion of the bride-price, the guiding principle being a fair division. When the father is absent and is entitled to the children, his relations take charge of them. M [586] But even though the father may be given legal ownership, neither Angoni nor Achewa ever take small children away from their mother, with whom they must remain "until they are able to understand," the father being allowed meanwhile to visit them from time to time.

III.—DOMESTIC LIFE: FILIAL.

1. *Infancy*.

M 845 Among the Achewa, twins were never killed. After being washed in medicine, they were taken with a present of a goat to the chief, who thereupon gave them their names. Until that was done, the chief could not visit their village. At night one twin sleeps on each side of the mother, who lies on her back. If one of them dies young, it is buried with a fruit of the "sausage tree" (*Kigelia pinnata*), so that it may not be lonely. Formerly, twin girls married the same man [582] at the same time, and twin brothers married their first wives at the same time.

M 429 Guardianship of a child is always vested in the father until initiation, when it passes to the *mwibwesi*, and on his death to the mother's other brothers, and then to the mother's sons.

N 429 593 Among the Angoni, the father is always guardian, with the modification that after marriage a girl must obey her husband before all others. When the father is dead, the father's brothers succeed according to age, then the father's sons in order, and then the sons of the father's brothers in their order.